Pam.
Africa-East
Madagascar

W Kendall Gale

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Gale

Report of a journey to the Marofotsy, the Sihanaka, and the Bezanozano.

To the N. of Anjozorobe is a vast tract of country, practically 500 miles by 360, and at the time of writing, without a single resident missionary.

In this tract of country, wild, mountainous, swampy, there are a few widely scattered churches of the L.M.S., and a handful of churches of the N.P.F., but apart from these, this enormous area is "lying in darkness and the shadow of death".

Ever since I settled in Anjozorobe in June 1910, I have longed to do something for these people at the back of beyond, but the urgent claims of the many weak churches here in northern Imerina, the wide stretching Bezanazano country to the E. of the forest, touched 8 years ago at five points only by the gospel, made such a project impossible. Ten years constant visitation and careful organisation of the Churches in Imerina and the Anjozorobe district, have borne fruit in increasing strength; churches had been planted over the greated part of the Bezanazano country, so that the prospect of at last a pioneer journey to the benighted N. to spy out the land, seemed at last a possibility.

Such a journey became almost imperative, as the Catholics had launched a forward movement among the Sihànaka and the Màrofòtsy, and had already placed Fathers and Sisters at various important centres. Their aggressiveness, however, was happily confined to these centres, as with few exceptions, they had made no attempt to evangalise the country. I accordingly mapped out a certain area as a commencement, and decided to visit every village within that area, endeavouring, if possible, to establish causes, wherever a sufficient number of signatures could be obtained to satisfy the requirements of the Government.

I had twice previously touched the fringe of the Marofotsy country at Ambàkirèny, five days journey from here, and had established a cause there. Of this Church I shall speak later.

I had had many urgent and pathetic appeals from the Màrofòtsy, and just before coming home, had sent three evangelists to visit certain villages, with the result that one cause was started during my furlough.

Though I visited 259 villages in all, I was the first European the natives, for the most part, had ever seen, and was the first European who had covered the Marofotsy country.

I started out with my ten men on July 23rd reaching a place called Amboasary in ten hours.

There civilisation and Christianity and comfort ended, next day peril, adventure and excessive toil commenced, for I struck N. into the utterly unknown. The adventurous parts can quite well be dispensed with, for after all, they were probably quite tame compared with those of Cullen Reed, etc.

First I struck a river called the Lakazana, deep, broad, infested with crocodiles, after which began an ascent of 1500 ft. and on the lofty tableland we journeyed from dawn till late afternoon, with only a track to guide us, a ghastly journey, not a sight of a house, or a village, or an animal. Towards evening we began to descend, a descent so precipitous that we wished ourselves on the tableland again. Down, down we went, descending at least 3,000 ft. to the Marofotsy plain. The heat on the heights was supportable, down on the plain it was almost unendurable. Just as darkness closed upon us, we reached Marotsipoy, a group of nine villages.

I at once gave the people the gramaphone and showed Scripture pictures, while my cook got a meal ready; except for a piece of bread I had had no meal from 5.30 a.m.; and it was 8.30 p.m. before I had finished the "entertainment". Next day I visited most of these villages and got their signatures, and in the evening gave most of my records. Already the petition has been granted, and an Ecole Pastoral put in charge. No. 1.

July 26th saw me off again, climbing 2,500 ft. and down 2,500 to a place called Manakana. At the summit of the mountains over which the path lay, was one of the most, superb and expansive views I have ever seen in my life; a vast plain far below, through which the Betsiboka runs, Vohimbohitra, a mountain 2,000 ft. high rising sheer out of the plain, perfectly circular, 50 miles round it, like Table mountains, almost flat on its summit, the haunt of wild goats and eagles, a mountain unequalled in Madagascar for massiveness and wonder; beyond the plain range after rolling range; their precipitous slopes gashed and riven in weird and awasome fashion, evidence of some gigantic upheaval, the whole view absolutely indescribable in its majesty and sweep.

We had started at daybreak, and the sun had set before we reached our destination. At Manakana I had a little Church started by the three evangelists mentioned and one of my college boys, with his wife and children were holding the fort there. It humbles me when I think of these Hova willing to go right away into the wilderness among Savages for 24/- a month, and college trained men at that. The circumstances under which Raiinizafindrasoa lives are appalling, a rush hut, grilling heat, water to drink with which a Londoner would scarcely wash his dog, malaria rampant, isolation complete. His neighbours are people who work only two days a week, all others being taboo, drunk most days. A family calls for a "jollification", and spends anything up to 300 $ in drink, equivalent to £300 in England. A funeral is the greatest event of the district, cattle are killed, rum flows like water, they drink until they fall into a stupor in which they often remain unconscious for days. At a village further N. there is a Greek drink-seller, who took $80 over the counter in one day for drink. Where do they get their money? The people are great cattle-breeders, and often have herds of a thousand. Morality among these people is a thing unknown, result sterility, or nearly so. In this village of 100 houses only 5 have children, the largest family being three. Unless saved by the Gospel they must soon become extinct. In every village in this great plain, stretching away to Maevatanàna and Tsàratanàna there are small isolated huts built by parents for their unmarried daughters for immoral purposes, and whither the men resort, youths and greybeards alike, married and single, any hour of the day or night and utterly without shame.

In this village, while visiting, I found a man with a broken thigh, he had laid three weeks on the floor of his hut, without attendance, the bone unset. The bone was beginning to knit, but it was setting all crooked, and he will be a cripple for life.

I feel that I want to come home again to tell some of the things I've seen on this journey, men rotting with disease and nobody to restrain and counsel them, villages almost childless, men the victims of appalling accidents, and no one to minister to them, animals glutting every appetite, etc.

I stayed two days at Kanàkana; like the Cinemas at home, reels in the machine without ceasing, gramaphone, Scripture pictures, organisation, sermons, teaching, singing, etc. Kanakàna is a splendid little cause, with a rush-dwelling for Church. Next year they are to build a proper brick chapel, and it is to help the people of this village for one that I am asking for a grant.

July 29th. I moved on N. to a village called Antsàtrana, where I got a petition signed. Here I came across something new, "Fokonòlona Schools", that is schools started by the people themselves; they put up the school building, provide brushes, maps, etc, they supply the teacher with a house, rice, and pay the whole of his salary. I found many of these on my travels, and with few exceptions, every village I entered pleaded for a school where none existed. Those already in existence I appropriated, and in many other places established schools, 13 in all, attaching them to the L.M.S. stipulating that they bear the entire cost of their upkeep. In every village polygamy is rife, and in the night of my stay at Antsatrana one man's wives came to blows, to the immense amusement of the populace; altogether a most degrading spectacle.

July 30th. passed on to Ambongamarina a group of very large villages. Petition No.3.

That same evening I pushed on to Andriamèna, where the I E.B. have a Church and an Evangelist.

Andriamana is a huge village, and the Church capable of holding 500. There is a resident French official here, a Protestant, and most friendly. His marriage had been properly registered in the Government, but he desired a religious ceremony, so I married him on August 1st, the first time I had performed the rite for a Frenchman, or any European in Madagascar.

The ceremony over, I struck S.E. reaching Ambàlanìrana by 7.30 p.m.long after dark. Here I got petition No.4. found a school in existence, which I took over. Here I had to occupy a filthy little hut, much less than your office, with four natives.

Aug:2nd. Went to Ambòhitranìvo and Ambòhimaràmitra, (S.E.) where I got petition No.5. and established a school.

Aug:3rd. There was nothing for it but to turn back as I had reached the end of the world, but I made a detour to a place called Tèlomìta, where I established another school, and got petition No.6. for a Church, the same evening reaching Andriamena.

Aug:4th. Preached twice at Andriamèna. Though in Andrìamèna an I.E.B.Church had been in existence many years, I was the first missionary who had ever visited the village, so I took upon myself to examine all the affairs of the Church, especially the accounts, reorganising, suggesting, and counselling, where I thought necessary, for which they were most grateful.

Aug:5th. Struck due E. over a superb range of mountains, then along the summit of the ridge N. for several hours. At last we spied a group of villages far away to the N. and just as darkness closed in reached Tsàravòhitra. Night though it was, the gramaphone "fetched" the people, and by 11 o'clock p.m. petition No.7. was signed, and another school put in hand.

Aug:6th. From Tsàravòhitra struck N. by noon reaching Keliloha, finding there a little group of Hova from Anjozorobe. Petition No.8. Late afternoon reached Ankisatra, a very large village, where I found a man from Ambohimanga. This man is a communicant, and has a day and a half's journey to go to Andriamena to commune, rarely missions the Sacrament, yet some folks at home can't cross the road, especially if it is a bit muddy. Petition No.9. School also.

Aug:7th. Turned S.W. a long exhausting day to Bemavo. I am giving you the barest outline. Established another school, and got a petition for a Church; No.10. Here we had a somewhat terrifying earthquake, the people rushing out of their houses in a panic. They said some unholy person had either brought a pig or bacon fat in the village, (which was taboo) which was the cause of the earthquake.

Aug:8th. Took the path due N. fording rivers, climbing mountains, amid heat that blistered the skin, to Bepilopilo, a low-lying miserable village. Here I found myself forestalled by the Catholics by exactly a fortnight, but after hours of persuasion, hours of gramaphone, showing all my pictures, entering every hovel, rounding up every available soul, just got sufficient for a petition: No.11. promising them a school also.

Aug:9th. On to Andàkana on the shores of the Màhajàmba, a very fine river, crossed on July 24th at Màrotsipòy. Visited 5 villages. There is a mighty witch-doctor here, who opposed me tooth and nail. Nobody would sign the petition, as they feared him, so I quietly sat down to argue the point, or points, with him. It took hours to win him, but at last he said, "Put my name down", after which there was almost a scramble on the part of the others to make their wavering mark, as they really desired a church. Petition No.12.

Aug 10th. Crossed the deep swift running Màhajanita in dug-out, following its winding course N. to Ambatomitsangana, which we reached by noon. Here for the first, and only time during my journey, I failed to get a petition, so passed on to Tsàratanàna, where there is an I.E.B. church and evangelist. Tsaratanana had heard of my coming, and when about 5 kilometres from the town I saw a crowd of 150 awaiting my arrival. The remainder of my journey to the village resembled the triumphant return of a conquering Tommy to his native heath. Tsaratanana is quite a town, and a very important administrative centre, with resident Administrative and Administrateur Adjoint. After the kabaries of welcome from the church, I went to pay my respects to the Administrateur, who not only received me most courteously, but insisted on my staying with him during my sojourn at Tsaratanana, a delightful and agreeable change after pigging it so long. It was the very best thing that could have happened, seeing I was fairly launched on the Evangelisation of the Marofotsy, and all my petitions must pass through his hands, and their being granted depended so largely upon an "airs favorable" from him. I had established friendly relations with his subordinate, the Chef de Poste at Andriamena, - and in fact he has sent me his photograph, and I had a letter from him yesterday, Nov.29th, saying that his report to the Administrateur was favourable, - and it was providential that I had a splendid opportunity of establishing equally friendly relations with the Administrateur, whose sympathy or unfriendliness mean so much. I was able for three days to thoroughly explain the objects of the L.M.S. both religiously and educationally, to remove any suspicion regarding the attitude of the L.M.S. missionaries towards the recent rebellion, - for the French are still "jumly" about it - and I left on the Tuesday amid expressions of the utmost cordiality from the Administrateure, and loaded with good things by Madame for my next plunge into the wilds, so that I have reasonable hopes that all my petitions will be accorded. I preached morning and afternoon, Aug 11th, at Tsaratanana to an immense crowd, for only once before had a missionary visited them. I had a Norwegian in my congregation in the morning, and a Scotchman from S.Africa in the afternoon. This Scotchman, who fought with the Boers against us in the S.African war, is in charge of a vast cattle ranch, and I was able to render him a service. He knew neither French nor Malagasy, and anthrax had broken out among his stock, and he was most anxious to get a Vet. from Majanga and serum for injection, and I was able to lay his case before the Administrateure, to get the telegraph in motion, to obtain these with all speed. This Scotchman is a huge fellow, 6 ft. 4 in. and during the afternoon service we had "Sing them over again to me" in Malagasy, and not knowing the Malagasy words, and not to be defeated of his hope of a good sing, he sang the English words, and made the Church ring with his massive voice. I likewise joined him in English. The natives were greatly struck with this, a striking example of the only really unifying force in the world, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I paid him a visit on the Monday, found his English and Boer Bibles open on his table, and before I left he gave me 60 francs for my work.

The whole of Monday, Aug.12th, was spent in conference. I had called up my two Marofotsy evangelists from Ambakireny and Manakana, also the two I.E.B. evangelists from Andriamana and Tsaratanana, together with the ray aman-dreny, and we discussed every part of the work, finance, S.Schools, evangelisation of the Maropotsy, etc, etc.

The way in which the Hova away in the interior think only of themselves, and make little or no effort to reach the heathen around them, is tragic; - as an example, in the Tsaratanana Church, only one Marofotsy (pronounced maroo-footsee) family attends the Church there. I spoke pretty strongly about this and formed a Marofotsy Isan Enin-Bolana to unify the few Churches there and to start them on an Evangelistic propaganda, to church and win the whole tribe. They had their first gathering at Andriamena Oct.16th, and 5 & 7 attended. They likewise collected 27 $ on the spot for aggressive work.

I am immensely proud of this bit of work, and before my next furlough is due, expect to see fine flourishing churches and schools over the whole area inhabited by this, at present, loathsome people.

When I reached Tsaratanana, a most pathetic appeal awaited me from villages far N. again, begging me to go out to them, to establish churches and schools among them, which I had to refuse, as I had to be back to address the I.E.B. in the Capital in Oct. and I had yet far to go.

I thought nothing could exceed in wildness, and grandeur, and difficulty, the country through which I had passed, but what I had seen was as flat as the Bedford level, compared with the country I was to see in the next two months.

Leaving Tsaratanana, we plunged into the bush, crossing a great plain, then up 3,000 ft. to the summit of Batsioka, "the mountain of the whistling wind," and whistle it did! Amid intolerable heat, I had had to foot every inch of the ascent, and the descent was so precipitous that I had to foot that also. It was dark when we reached the gold diggers' village of Ambatobe, but I set the gramaphone going, got a host of signatures, took over the village school, and slept in a "pig-sty" with four natives. Ugh ! Petition No. 13.

Off at first peep of dawn to Ambohipihaonana, an hour away, to get their signatures, and link them up with Ambatobe in petitioning for a church. Both these villages are in the full concession of Le Syndicat Lyonais, and when in town in October, the Directeur graciously granted me permission to erect a church on their property.

On we went, the hardest day I have ever known in my life, over another terrific range, down a perilous descent, across what seemed a limitless plain, to Antsakomadinika. I had had a alight meal at daybreak, my next was 10.35 p.m. On this path an Englishman perished recently, attempted the journey alone and on foot, found no village where he could obtain food, was spent by the heat, the ascents and descents, laid down exhausted, and perished.

Next morning Kabary at daybreak, petition No. 14 signed, and away S.W. to Ampandrana, almost a repetition of the previous day. During my furlough, my evangelist at Ambakireny had started a cause here. At 7.30 evening, pitch dark, we reached the edge of the deep swift running river encircling the town. On the other side we saw in the darkness a crowd of white-clad figures awaiting our arrival, 300 strong. They plunged into the river to greet me, all wanting to shake hands with me at once in mid-stream. Mounting the hill to the village they all burst out singing "Andro Soa" "O Happy Day," and other hymns. The welcome was overwhelming. I preached next morning at 7 in a house, discussed new church building (since finished) S.School, etc,etc.,until noon. My plans for reaching Antsampandrano that evening seemed as though they would miss fire to mix my metaphor, for every one of my men was ill, except my little cook, utterly spent. The Governor of the village, however, rounded up all their men, "laid hands suddenly on them", commanded them to lay hold of the filanjana and luggage, sent others ahead to have relays waiting in the villages through which I was to pass, and so by nightfall, by forced marches, I reached Antsampandrano, where I got petition No.15, and established a school. My

own men were to rest three days, and meet me further South. Unhappily when I wanted to start next morning I found that all my men of the previous day had decamped. After a delay of 3 hours, by scouring the neighbouring villages, the governor forcibly pressed men into my service, and through thick bush, in blinding rain and driving wind, up hill and down dale, we reached Ambohimiarina, a little after sunset. Part of the journey lay along the bed of a river for 5 kilometres, no other road. Here also in my absence my evangelist at Ambakireny had started a cause, and I found a fine substantial Church, capable of holding 250, already erected. Dark though it was, I lit candles and we had a service, after which I doctored the sick and discussed church affairs until nearly midnight.

It was short commons for Ambohimiarina, but next day, Aug 18th, was the centenary of the landing of the first missionaries in Madagascar, and I was anxious to observe the great day at Ambakireny, my first church in the Marofotsy Country, and in order to do so I had to be off next day at sunrise. Ambakireny is perhaps the most wonderful church I've got. My first visit was in 1912, and a fiasco, owing to Government opposition; result: the people who had pleaded and pleaded for a church, being put in prison. I went again in 1913 and got a petition signed; refused. After petitioning five times we got permission to worship in a house. I visited them again in 1915, and we worshipped in a tiny hovel of rushes. To-day there is a church seating 300, decorated, pulpit of stone and inlaid wood, harmonium, pews the length of the Church, a beautiful flower-galden within the fenced enclosure, a lych gate with the carved sign above: "Fiangonana Protestante D'Ambakireny."

They have a congregation of 300, a S.School of 200, a C.E. and on the Centenary day they collected 70$ to buy a bell. They have two daughter churches already, have bought a Manse for the Evangelist, supply him with all the rice he needs, and give him 3$ a month. I am justly proud of Ambakireny.

I gave my men a rest the morning of Aug.19th, but after dinner we started S. to Ambavasambo. Petition No.16. Next day N.W. to Ambolosy. Petition No.17. Next day to Maromaniry. Petition No.18. Then N. to Ambohimiarina again, to square up a/cs, which were in a state of chaos. Preached there again. Next day back to Ambakireny for a Conference, about the staffing and conduct of the two daughter Churches.

Next day, with additional men, I managed to reach the Sihanaka, staying at a place called Manohilahy, passing through the forest on the way.

From Manohilahy I struck S. to visit a village called Soalazaina, which we were assured was only two hours' journey, but which took us ten, as we were in the bush all the day. Petition No.19.

Next day striking E. we got lost, and to make matters worse the luggage carriers got separated from us; they had taken a different track, but happily we found each other next day. This is a constant peril and difficulty, the paths divide, and the problem is to know the one we should take.

Here I spent a week visiting my Sihanaka Churches. Monday, Sept.2nd, I took the path into the unknown again, Ididy being my objective, and yet not quite unknown, for in 1911 I took a pioneer journey to Ididy, the extreme N.E. corner of the Bázànazàno, where I got four petitions, all refused. Reached Abohimanjaka in the afternoon. Petition No. 21.

(I have forgotten Betambako, Sihanaka, petition No.20.)

Next day across the vast Ididy swamp, as big as Middlesex, in dug out, to Ambohijanatary, under the edge of the lower forest, visible from Tamatave. Petition No.22. Then S. within the forest, skirting the swamp, to Ambodifano, Petition No.23. Continued my journey the same day, crossing an arm of the swamp to Ambohibe, the ancient Capital of the Bezanqzano Kings. Petition No.24. Next day over a superb mountain to Tsaratampona. Petition No.25, and on the

same evening to Imerimanjaka, a village of notorious bandits and cattle stealers. They refused to receive us, told us plainly to move on, declined to give us rice, water, lodgement, etc. They would as lief slit your throat as decapitate a fowl. We got all we wanted at length, but I've passed many a more comfortable night. Before we left every man and woman had signed petition No.25, joining up with Tsaratampona. Next day we should have had a bad time but for my compass, no road whatever, and a thick fog. Reached Tsarahalana, where I have a Church, the on to Amparihiyola, another of my Churches, then on to Fierenana, where I have an Evangelist. From there went S. to Ampantakana. Petition No.26., then over the hills N.W. to Faravohitra, petition No.27.

After this I visited all my remaining Bezanozano Churches, numbering 5 in 1913, now 45, ascending to Imerina st length, sleeping at a place called Andranomay. Petition No.28, which with another I made in Imerina on my first day out from Anjozorobe, numbers 29.

On my visit to the Bezanozano in April, May, and June, I got 6 petitions, making 35 sent in since April. I have also sent one from the Vohilena, Anativolo district, bringing the total up to 36. In the same time I have started 18 schools, 13 in the Marofotsy, 4 in the Bezanozano, and 1 in Imerina. All these have not been granted by the Government, but I see no reason why any of them should be refused, but on the other hand am fairly confident they will be granted. Some of the Marofotsy Churches and schools I shall hand over to the I.E.B. as being within what may justly be called their district.

This Report has already run to the enormous length of 21 written pages, and yet I have rigorously suppressed all details, and given the barest skeleton. Don't groan when you see it, as I shall inflict no other report on you this year.

The Bezanozano is churched from end to end, except one village to be visited next year; the Marofotsy I hope soon will be, and then with the help of my colleagues, I have reasonable hopes of winning these degraded peoples for Christ, not only saving them spiritually, but physically as well.

(Sd) W.KENDALL GALE,
Anjozorobe.
Nov.30th 1918.